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The World's Unborn Soul

"The noblest of all investigations," as Socrates said, "is the study of what man should be and what he should pursue." For this it is necessary to study history, for history is not a series of secular happenings without shape or pattern but a meaningful process, a significant development. Thereby we may glimpse a region beyond the body and the intellect, the soul of man the determining principle of body and mind.

The Greeks were the first to attempt to make life rational and uninfluenced by the dictates of the state or the scruples of the scriptures, to ask what is the right life for man and to apply the principles of reason and order to the chaos of primitive beliefs.

Plato tells us that the universal or the general idea determines the nature of a particular individual and has greater reality than the latter – the world of ideas is the only realm of certainty in which man can dwell secure, freed from opinion and probability. But the Greeks were not famous for their religious genius or moral fervour. We do not come across among them,

any hunger for the eternal - or any passionate indignation against injustice. Devotion to the city State filled the spiritual vacuum in the Greek consciousness. Plato, it is true, dreamed of an ideal society but it was conceived as a City State not a commonwealth of Mankind. Greek civilization came to an end mainly on account of its adherence to the false religion of patriotism. "This state worship was the spiritual disease that Hellenism died of." (A.J. Toynbee - "Essays in Honour of Prof. Gilbert Murray).

Rome succeeded Greece but with her, religion became a deification of the Emperor. Such a religion could not satisfy the immortal longings of man.

Then from an obscure province of the Great Roman Empire, came an influence which changed the course of history. To a humble Jewish peasant woman in Palestine was born a son who claimed that he was the Son of God. He was crucified by the priests of his land because they considered that a heresy, but within a few years of his death his teachings were carried by his disciples to the capital of the Empire for they believed that their Master still lived and that his spirit which was the spirit of God, was with them, and many ~~people believed in him~~. of his own people and of the rulers, believed in him.

For the most spiritual of Greek thinkers, God was the "Idea of the Good," "The First Mover," "The Ruling Principle." For the Jews and Christians God is a supreme person who reveals his will to his law-givers and prophets and while the greatest of Hellenistic thinkers had no conception of history as a purposive process with a direction and a goal, but believed it to be a cyclic process, the Jews had faith in an historical process and they believed in an event which would be the definitive solution of the historical problem — the birth of a Messiah (The Anointed).

The Christian view represents a blend of the Greek and Jewish conceptions of the historical. The vigorous intellectual life of the Middle ages was devoted to the explication of the problem of reconciling the Jewish emphasis on the historical and the Christian doctrine of incarnation with the absolute and non-historical character of the God-head. The problem still remains unsolved. Nicholas Berdyaev refers to this difficulty thus — "According to the dogma of the Church and to prevailing philosophy, the possibility of a ~~Move~~ movement or of an historical process in the depths of divine life would appear to be incompatible with the Christian conciousness."

The association of the Christian faith with the State (the Roman Empire) after the time of Constantine gave rise to intolerance with other forms of religious belief taking shelter under the words — "He that is not with me is against me and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth."

"While medieval Christianity gave to Europe a sure sense of the reality of the unseen, which holds the key to the destiny of man and the clue to right conduct, and thus redeemed even the ~~intellectual~~ and artistic pagans from an easy, self-centred and self-complacent superficiality it imposed on Europe religious bigotry, which stifled free intellectual inquiry and fostered narrowness & obscurantism. But people whose physical and mental powers are unexhausted cannot remain content with such an order. The Capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453 destroyed the last remains of the Roman Empire in the East and ushered in a new era. Greek thought again attracted attention. The greatest Minds perceived the inter relations of the divine and the human. Dante tells us that divine providence has set before man two ends: blessedness of this life, and blessedness of eternal life - Religion and humanism are not opposites. Each needs the characteristic gifts and graces

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of the Other. This recognition prepared the way for the belief in the perfectibility of man & society which was later raised to the rank of a dogma.

(Para) And so we come to the Renaissance under the influence of the new movement aiming at a complete rehabilitation of the human spirit, ~~Copernicus~~ science started on its unfettered career. The Sky changed with Copernicus, and the habitable world with the explorers. The scientific and technological achievements cast the world into a closely knit unity and modern history slowly grew into the stature of world history.

But philosophical thought began to be influenced by the prestige of science. Metaphysics had to be strict ~~sense~~ science. Spinoza said that "Truth would be eternally hidden from the human race had not Mathematics, which deals not with ends, but the nature and properties of figures, shown to man another norm of truth." The English school of empiricism attempted to get rid of all ideas which do not correspond to facts of all propositions which cannot be tested by experience. The infallibility of the Church had yielded to the infallibility of scientific reason.

The influence of the Renaissance aided the breaking of the power of the Papacy and the Reformation insisted on the right of the individual reason to determine the sense of the inspired Scripture. The result was that Christian theology got steadily

rationalized and began to be recommended on the ground that it could be reconciled with scientific truth and ethical values. Scientific truth and ethical values became more important than divine revelation itself. The infallibility of the Church had yielded to the infallibility of scientific reason.

In its turn scientific reasoning seems to be failing us and we are in a tide of reaction against it. The different philosophical tendencies of voluntarism, pragmatism, and vitalism are indications of the transition from the predominantly rationalistic period of human development.

Today the position is one of uncertainty, a fundamental agnosticism, a sense of uneasiness that we are hastening confusedly to unknown ends.

Neither a contented fatalism nor religious expectancy nor reversions to the past can give meaning to a world in search of its soul.

Every civilization is an experiment in life, an essay in creation to be discarded when done with. Nature takes up an idea works out its form till, at the moment of its perfect expression, it reveals some fundamental flaw and then breaks it up again to begin anew a different pattern. Yet in some way the wisdom Spirit of all past forms enter into those which succeed them, and inspire the gradual evolution of the purpose of history.

The bitterness of spirit and bewilderment of outlook of man today, is not a cause of despair. They are signs that he has reached a more advanced state of spiritual maturity and therefore the dogmas of traditional religions are no longer able to answer his questions or overcome his doubts. The present profound "Malaise" is really a form of growing pains.

In times of trouble we draw the deepest inspiration from sources outside us, from the newly recovered past of the achievement of men under different skies. The only past known to the European emerging from the Middle Ages was the Biblical and the Graeco-Roman. But today with the whole world for our cultural base it would be an academic error, a failure of perspective to confine ourselves to the teaching of the Hebrews and the Greeks. There are others who have participated in the ~~sep~~ supreme adventure of the ages, the prophets of Egypt, the Sages of China and the Seers of India who are guide posts disclosing to us the course of the trail. Of the living non-European civilizations the chief are the Islamic, the Chinese, and the Hindu. The Islamic has the same historical background as Judaism and Christianity, which is well known in the west. The humanist civilization religion

of China was considerably affected by the religious conceptions of India, especially the Buddhist. Religion, however, has been the master passion of the Hindu mind, a lamp unto its feet and a light unto its path, the presupposition and basis of its civilization, the driving force of its culture, and the expression — of its life in God. In the West, even in the most sympathetic quarters, Hindu thought is in general a subject for respectful, but in every sense distant homage, not of living concern. There ~~has been~~ is however a desire on the part of the West to lift Eastern thought from its sheltered remoteness and indicate its enduring value as a living force in shaping the soul of the modern man.

Hinduism adopts a rationalist attitude in the matter of religion. It tries to study the facts of human life in a scientific spirit, not only the obvious facts, the triumphs and defeats of men who slup in spiritual unconsciousness, but the facts of life's depths. Religion is not ~~so~~ so much a Revelation to be attained by us in faith as an effort to unveil the deepest layers of man's being and get into enduring contact with them.

The religions of the world can be distinguished into those which emphasize the object and those

which insist on experience. For the first class, religion is an attitude of faith & Conduct directed to a power without; for the second, it is an experience to which the individual attaches supreme value. The Hindu & the Buddhist religions are of this class — for them religion is Salvation.

There are systems of Hindu thought like the Sāmkhya and the Jaina which do not admit God but affirm the reality of the Spiritual Consciousness. There are theists like Rāmānuja for whom the spiritual Consciousness, though not God Himself, is the only way in which God can be known. All, however, are agreed in regarding salvation as the attainment of the true status of the individual. Belief and conduct, rites and ceremonies, authorities and dogma, are assigned a place subordinate to the art of Conscious self-discovery and contact with the divine. This distinction of the Hindu religion was observed even by the ancients. Philostratus puts in the mouth of Apollonius of Tyana these words: "all wish to live in the nearness of God, but only the Hindus bring it to pass."

About spiritual experience, Sir Charles Eliot writes that "it has been confirmed by the experience

of men whose writings testify to their intellectual power and have commanded the respect of the masses. "It must command our respect too, even if it is contrary to our temperament, for it is the persistent ideal of a great nation and cannot be explained away as hallucination or charlatanism." (Hinduism & Buddhism Vol 1. (1921) P. lxii)

Brahman which is the Sanskrit word for the Absolute, is the principle of search as well as the object sought, the animating idea and its fulfilment. It is the striving of the Soul for the infinite. The impulse that compels us to raise the question of the true, the divine, is itself divine. Brahman stands for the breath, "the breath of ~~God~~ the power of God", as it is said in the wisdom of Solomon. It is man's sense of the divine as well as the divine, and the two meanings ~~Coalesce~~ Coalesce. The transcendent self stoops down as it were and touches the eyes of the empirical self, overwhelmed by the delusion of the world's work. When the individual withdraws his zone from all outward events, gathers himself together too inwardly and strives with concentration, there breaks upon him an experience, secret, strange and wondrous which becomes his very being. Even if God be an idea and had no reality apart from one's ideation, that which frames the idea of God and strives to realize it is

itself divine. Our longing for perfection, our sense of lack, our striving to attain consciousness of infinity, our urge to the ideal, are sources of divine revelation. They are to be found in some measure in all things. The very fact that we seek God clearly proves that life cannot be without Him... God is life. Recognition of this fact is spiritual consciousness.

God is "given" and is the factual content of the spiritual experience. But there is a difference between the mystery of godliness and belief in God, and a man may know much about theology but yet be lacking in the spirit of religion. The Hindu thinkers warn us against rationalistic self-sufficiency. The learned run far more risks than the unlearned. In the Chandogya Upanisad, Narada confesses that all his scriptural learning has not taught him the true nature of the Self and in the same Upanisad, Svetaketu in spite of his study of the scriptures for the prescribed period is said to be merely conceited and not well instructed. Spiritual

attainment is not the perfection of the intellectual man but an energy pouring into it from beyond it, vivifying it. The Katha Upanisad says, "as the self existent pierced the opening of the senses outwards, one looks outward, not within himself. A certain thoughtful person, seeking immortality turned the eye inward and saw the self. God is not an intellectual idea or a moral principle, but the deepest consciousness from whom ideas and rules derive. We are saved, not by creeds but by gnosis, jnānā or spiritual wisdom. Ruysbroeck says "If we desire to taste God in ourselves we must pass beyond reason - - - - we must remain despoiled and free of all images. - - - - We go on to a state of ignorance and darkness to suffer the higher confirmation of the Eternal word, the image of the Father."

To be spiritual is not to reject reason but to go beyond it. It is to think so hard

that thinking becomes knowing or viewing. What we might call Creative thinking.

That god may be found in the "Self" is testified to by the saints. St Augustine said "I, Lord went wandering like a stray sheep seeking Thee with anxious reasoning without, whilst Thou were within me ..... I went round the streets and squares of the city of this world seeking thee, and I found thee not; because in vain I sought without for him who was within myself." We make a detour round the universe to get back to the self. The oldest wisdom in the world tells us that we can consciously unite with the divine while in this body, for this is man really born. If he misses his destiny, Nature is not in a hurry; she will catch him some day and compel him to fulfil her secret purpose. Truth, beauty, peace, power, and wisdom are all attributes of the divine self which awaits our finding.

There are, however, two selves — the universal and the empirical. The universal self is described in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, "When the sun and the moon have both set, the fire has gone out and speech has stopped, Yājñavalkya, what serves as the light for a man? The self serves as ~~the~~ his light. It is through the light of the self that he sits, goes out, works and returns." — it is svasiddha. The empirical self is a system of energies, ~~phys~~ psychological and logical and lays claim to perfect independence and individuality, little knowing that it can conserve itself only by perpetual change. The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad makes a distinction between the two birds which dwell in the same tree, one eating sweet fruit

15 and the other looking on without eating.
— the former is the empirical self and the latter the transcendental or universal self.

The phenomenal character of the empirical self & the world answering to it is denoted by the word Māya which signifies the fragility of the Universe. Māya does not mean that the empirical world with the selves in it, is an illusion. Māya is a term employed also to indicate the tendency to identify ourselves with our apparent selves and become exiled from our spiritual consciousness with its maximum of clarity and certainty. This tendency is the expression of the working of self-conscious reason.

By steady discipline man can be led back to the pure being, the subject that reflects, and reach that state of immediacy and unity in which all chaos disappears. The I, the {ātman}, the universal self,

infinitely simple, is a trinity of transcendent ~~awareness~~ reality (sat). awareness (cit) and freedom (ananda). This exaltation, this motionless concentration this holy calm and deep serenity which is like the state of a deep sea at rest, or in the image of the Bhagavadgita, "Still as a flame in a windless place," bathed as it were in an incomprehensible brightness (tejas) is hard to describe. When however, we lapse back from this state into our ordinary consciousness, we represent the Self as another with its transcendent Majesty. In this mood we represent the supreme as the sovereign ~~Majesty~~ personality encompassing this whole world, working through the cosmos and ourselves for the realization of the universal kingdom. We may adopt the mode of bhakti or devotion, or the mode of jnana or contemplation, by which the self, set free from all that is not self, retains its pure dignity.

Sankara brings out clearly

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(7) the distinction between the absolute self, the divine person, and the human individual:—

"Therefore the unconditioned self, being beyond speech and mind, ~~undifferentiated~~ undifferentiated and one, is designated as "not this, not this;" when it has the limiting adjuncts of the body and organs which are characterized by imperfect knowledge, desire and work, it is called the empirical individual self; and when the self has the limitation of the creative power manifesting through eternal and unlimited knowledge, it is called the inner ruler and divine person. The same self as by its Nature transcendent, absolute and pure, is called the immutable and supreme self".

If Samkara distinguishes Brahman from Isvara, Eckhart contrasts the Godhead (Deitas) with God (Deus). While God is the personal triune God of church doctrine which becomes and dis-becomes, the pure Godhead stands high above God, and is the ground of the possibility of God, who is absorbed in the Godhead, which is beyond & being

and goodness.

The criticisms that Hindu thought holds that the world is an illusion (Maya) and that it is divine, cancel each other and point out that the Hindu is aware of both the upward and the downward movements. The way to the divine has two sides, the negative and the positive. The negative takes us to the spiritual consciousness the "Divine Darkness," "the nameless, formless nothing." Affirmation however affirms that the great silent sea of infinity in which the individual loses his name and form is also the over-mastering, all embracing life. Here is the refrain of the Chāndogya Upanisad: "This whole world has that being for itself. That is reality. That is the Self. That art thou or Svetaketu." It is the real of the real. (Satyasya satyam). For the Hindu thinkers the objective world exists. It is not an illusion- to regard the the world as ultimately real is delusion (Moha).

Reality and existence are not to be set against each other as metaphysical contraries. For one who has the vision of

supreme, life, personality & history become important. The life of God is the fullness of our life. The body is necessary for the Soul and therefore is not to be despised. St. Paul said "I live and yet not I, but it is Christ who liveth in me". In the order of nature he keeps up his separate individuality; in the order of spirit, the divine has taken hold of him, remoulding his personality. He works in the world with the faith that life in its pure quality is always noble and beautiful and only its frustration evil.

If by the mode of bhakti or devotion or the method of jnana or contemplation we set the self free from all that is not self and we perceive the Brahman within ourselves, we must become conscious too that all individuals, races, and nations are but specific articulations of that same Brahman.

If the profound malaise of our day is really a form of growing pains mankind is

~~not~~ still in the making. What is required is not professions and programmes but the power of the spirit in the hearts of men: so indeed may we hope for salvation for all men: and so may we look forward to that "Divine event toward which the whole creation moves".